

22 May 2018

Standing Committee on Health and Wellness
Second Report of the Third Session Sixty-fifty General Assembly
Committee Activities

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

The Standing Committee on Health and Wellness is charged with matters concerning health, social programs, health infrastructure, persons with disabilities, and sport. In addition, it may, by majority decision of its membership meet to examine and inquire into such matters and things as the committee deems appropriate.

Committee Membership

Hal Perry, Chair (District 27, Tignish-Palmer Road)

Peter Bevan-Baker (District 17, Kellys Cross-Cumberland)

Hon. Jordan Brown (Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture; District 13, Charlottetown-Brighton)

Hon. Richard Brown (Minister of Communities, Land and Environment; District 12, Charlottetown-Victoria Park)

Kathleen Casey (District 14, Charlottetown-Lewis Point)

Darlene Compton (District 4, Belfast-Murray River)

Sidney MacEwen (District 7, Morell-Mermaid)

Hon. Chris Palmer (Minister of Economic Development and Tourism; District 21, Summerside-Wilmot)

The following members served as a substitute:

Hon. Sonny Gallant, Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning

Hon. Patrick Murphy, Minister of Rural and Regional Development

Hon. Paula Biggar, Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy

Colin LaVie (District 1, Souris-Elmira)

Matthew MacKay (District 20, Kensington-Malpeque)

Former committee member: Bush Dumville (District 15, West Royalty-Springvale)

Committee Activities

Your committee met **Four** times during the time frame covered by this report: on February 27, March 13, March 27 and May 3, 2018.

Your committee first met on **February 27, 2018**, to receive a briefing on the recruiting process for doctors and nurses in Prince Edward Island from the Department of Health and Wellness. Kevin Barnes and Rebecca Gill from the Recruitment and Retention Secretariat provided an overview of the role of the secretariat and the priorities for recruitment in the Province.

On **March 13, 2018**, your committee met and was briefed on the Catastrophic Drug Program and another 25 drug programs available in the Province by the Department of Health and Wellness. Denise Lewis Fleming, Chief Operating Officer and Grant Wyand, Manager Provincial Pharmacare Programs for Health PEI informed your committee on the criteria to access the program. Your committee heard that the programs cost approximately \$34.5 million to administer. The witnesses also described the variety of scenarios which require the variety of drug programs currently on offer. They also explained that combining the plans into a unified plan is not feasible given the diversity of situations they encounter.

Your committee met again on **March 27, 2018**. The Rotary Club of Montague presented on health challenges in eastern Kings County. Presenting were Carla Morgan, Maureen Hanley and Sharon Riley. They briefed your committee regarding the Rotary Club of Montague “Rotary Goldmine” and how the Club helps individuals in need on a case by case basis in Kings County. Your committee heard that the presenters act, in a volunteer capacity, as social support workers. Community members in need seek them out for help, often in desperate circumstances. They issue small grants, up to \$1,000 per person, for items which vary based on the situation.

Your committee met on **May 3, 2018** to consider its report to the Legislative Assembly.

Recommendations

As a result of its deliberations, your committee is pleased to recommend the following to the Members of the Legislative Assembly:

1. That the Catastrophic Drug Plan be renamed to more accurately reflect the function of the program.

Your committee heard that the Catastrophic Drug Plan is not only a plan for patients suffering from a catastrophic illness but also applies to any situation where the cost of medication is catastrophic to the patient based on their financial circumstances. Changing the name to be more reflective of this fact ensures that more patients are aware that they may qualify for the program.

2. That the Department of Health and Wellness and the Medical Society of PEI review its records retention and management policies with a view to ensuring security and accessibility of health records

Currently, health records are maintained by physicians. When a physician leaves the province or retires, the records are generally transferred to the replacement physician. The reason for this recommendation is twofold:

- a) Ensuring that there are no barriers to new physicians may help with attracting new doctors to the province.
- b) Additionally, patients can be sure that their information is protected by government.

3. That the Department of Health and Wellness review its current coverage for certain medical expenses and supplies.

During the March 27th meeting, your committee was briefed by the Rotary Club of Montague on the community support they offer. Many instances of support were related to medical supplies not covered by the provincial government. Currently, ostomy supplies, dental care, and insulin pumps for those over 18 years of age are not fully covered by the Province. These supplies can cost \$400 to \$500 per month for affected patients. In addition, the list of eligible expenses for off-Island medical appointments should be reviewed to determine enhancements, if any.

4. That government direct the appropriate departments to undertake a comprehensive review of the Social Assistance Program to ensure clients can access the Food Bank while receiving supports.

Currently the maximum number of times that a client receiving social service benefits can access the Food Bank is limited before their benefits are clawed back. Your committee recommends that government review the program to ensure that participants of the Social Assistance Program can access food banks to supplement their food allowance without resulting in a claw back of benefits.

5. Encourage government to continue developing best practices in school food programs with the Food Environment Officer.

During the March 27th meeting, your committee was briefed by the Rotary Club of Montague on the supports they offer for school food programs. The witnesses have observed that the programs are working well but are in need of some coordination to share best practices. The Food Environment Officer is a position already in place with the Public School Branch and is working on this initiative.

6. That government research and report back to the Legislative Assembly the requirements to implement a basic income guarantee program.

The Rotary Club of Montague reported that in many cases, families requiring support from the proceeds of their “Rotary Goldmine” fundraiser have fully employed adults who are working minimum wage. Despite full-time employment, they are still requiring additional supports to heat their home, buy groceries, and provide other necessities for their family. Guaranteeing citizens a basic income is a step towards reducing poverty.

7. Encourage government to engage with private entities in addition to its current utilization of resources to facilitate health professional recruitment in Prince Edward Island.

The Government of Prince Edward Island should engage external recruiters who would work in parallel to the Recruitment and Retention Secretariat. The recommendation seeks to ensure that health professional recruitment efforts are maximized in the province.

Conclusion

Your committee acknowledges and thanks the witnesses who provided information and advice on health and wellness matters in Prince Edward Island.

Respectfully submitted,

Hal Perry, MLA Chair
Standing Committee on Health and Wellness